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PERSONAL NAMES AMONG THE TIWI[1]

By C. W. M. HART

[171] 551 THE Tiwi, who inhabit Melville and Bathurst Islands in North Australia, are in many respects unlike the other Australian peoples. So little is known, however, about the subject of personal names among Australian tribes that it is impossible to say whether in this respect also [121] they are atypical. Among the Tiwi at any rate personal names and the customs attaching to them play a very important part in the life of the tribe, and in this paper an attempt is made to describe this element of their culture and to explain it.

Every member of the Tiwi has not one name but many, each of which belongs to him or her alone and each having an equal validity as a term of address or of description, though naturally some are used more frequently than others. This is to say, although a man with five different names may be addressed or referred to by any one of those five names, nevertheless the normal thing is for one name to be much more generally used than any of the others, it being for a native, as for us, much easier to think of a person by a single name than by several.

553 602 The multiplicity of names is accounted for by the fact that quite a number of the relatives have the right to bestow names upon a new-born child and a certain proportion of them will always exercise that right. The father may always bestow names upon his own children, and the father's brothers, who are of course the classificatory fathers of the child, have the same power. The mother's brothers may also bestow names upon a child, should they so desire, and less frequently children will be found bearing names given to them by the older men of their own totem clan, that is not only the mother's brothers but also other

[122] [1] This paper, which was presented to Section F, Anthropology, of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science at the Brisbane Meeting, May 1930, contains part of the results of research carried out in 1928 and 1929 as Science Research Scholar of Sydney University, and with the aid of a grant from the Australian National Research Council.

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relatives of the mother, such as the mother's mother's brother. The Tiwi have matrilineal totemic clans. 553 602

Names are seldom bestowed upon an individual by women; the only female relative having that power is the actual mother's mother. A mother is never in any circumstances allowed to name her own child. The reason for this is fairly obvious. The naming of children is a ritual affair, and as such is more or less forbidden to the women, for although their exclusion is not nearly so strict as in some other parts of Australia, they do not, among the Tiwi, take very much part in ritual affairs. The mother's mother, however, stands in a rather privileged position to her daughter's child. She is of the same totem and is normally a very old woman, and to a certain extent appears to become a symbol of the clan for her daughter's son. A boy, for example, will strongly resent and often endeavour to revenge any insult to his mother's mother, even if it means taking up arms against his own father. For example, during my stay a boy of twelve abused his father and quitted his father's camp for over a month because in a fight between hordes his father had injured the boy's mother's mother's brother. There was no particular respect or regard for the latter individual on the part of the boy, but the injury was a grave insult to his mother's mother. [603] [562] 603

It must also be understood that it is impossible for any two people to have the same name. Should a father inadvertently bestow upon his child a name already in use he is guilty of a gross breach of etiquette, and to prevent such a possibility a man will refrain for a long time from coining a name until he is fairly certain that the one he decides upon is neither already in use nor was held by any person recently dead. Although the Tiwi number nearly eleven hundred people at the present time, and each one of these has on an average three names, a careful study of these three thousand three hundred names fails to reveal any two as being identical. 551 [161]

By the time that a child reaches puberty he is the possessor of several names since by then some at least of the people entitled to bestow names upon him will have exercised that privilege. In exceptional cases he may have six or seven names though sometimes only one. All of these will have been known at some time or other to the tribe at large, though it is usually possible to get a full list of a person's names only from that individual himself or his father or mother.

It is not at all unusual in primitive societies for the death of a man to

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551 render his name tabu. This is the case among the Tiwi. All the names of a dead man become strictly *pukimani* (=tabu) immediately upon his death. Anyone in the tribe who uses a name of a dead person at any time for years after his death but especially in the period—usually about five to six months—that always elapses between the death and the funeral corroboree, violates one of the strictest social sanctions the tribe possesses. 192 And this prohibition extends to all words in the ordinary language— 551 though curiously enough not in the sacred language—which bear any 765 resemblance in sound to any one of the names of the dead man. It applies equally to English names in use by the tribe with resemblances to native or English words and to native words which resemble either English or native words. Thus a boy named *Tipuki* having died "tobacco," "baccy," *Tiparkitimiri* all equally became *pukimani*. Similarly when *Mulankina*, one of the Mandeimbula horde died, *mulikina*, one of the commonest words in the language, meaning "plenty," "full," "enough," was dropped completely from the language.

551 Nor does the *pukimani* stop here. Not only is the use of any of the 553 names of the dead man prohibited, but there is an equally strong rule against the use of any of the personal names he has bestowed upon other people, be they his own children or the children of others. A young child may only have one name, that given him by his father, but should his father die he must become nameless until he gets a new name from somewhere. This aspect of the *pukimani* does not extend to similar words in either the ordinary or the sacred language. For instance although [192 765] *Tambu*, a proper name bestowed by an old man became *pukimani* on the latter's death, the ordinary word *tamu* (imperative form of verb 'to sit down') was not affected.

582 On account chiefly of the extreme form of polygyny practised by the 595 Tiwi whereby most of the girls and young women belong to a comparatively few old men, the father of a family is almost invariably much older than his wife. While a woman goes to live with her husband at about the age of 13, a man is lucky to get his first wife under the age of 35. It follows that in the great majority of cases the father of children dies 587 long before the mother. Therefore as a woman without a husband is unknown amongst the Tiwi, a woman passes through the possession of quite a number of different men during her lifetime and does not remain in an unmarried state for more than a day or two. A widow

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normally gets a new husband as soon as her previous husband is dead, frequently on the same day. Certainly she does not remain single for more than a week, save in exceptional circumstances as when the man to whom by common consent of the horde she is to pass, is absent. She will then remain with her brothers or with the other wives of her husband-elect until his return.

It can now be seen whence the people with tabued names derive their new names. A child who is nameless because his father has died and thereby rendered *pukimani* those names which he has given the child, gets a new name immediately from the new husband of his mother. It is important to notice that this new husband renames not only the children of the recently dead man by his new wife, but all her children no matter who may have been their father.[1]

These newly acquired names then become the ordinary names of the individuals concerned and are retained until the new husband in turn dies, when once more the names are changed by the next husband of the mother. Thus it is literally true that no one has a permanent name until the death of his mother.

The names themselves are rather interesting. With a few exceptions they can be classified into groups by their endings. A full list of these groups is hardly important enough to warrant inclusion here, and a few examples will suffice. The commonest ending of all is *-miri* as in such names as *Timatalotimiri*, *Pripanyimiri*, *Tipilamberanyitimiri*. This is distinctly a masculine ending. There is a corresponding feminine suffix *-mo*, *Kidjibongkimo*, *Munyilatimo* being examples.

These suffixes *-miri* and *-mo* are the only two with a definite signification of sex; the others are indeterminate. For example, *Ilimatirimiinyi* is a man while *Punyilantamiinyi* is a woman. Similarly with *Pripanyimirli* who is a man and *U-lau-undimirli* who is a woman.

To understand the coining of the names it must be understood that amongst the Tiwi there are two languages, one the ordinary language in everyday use, the other a sacred language used only in ceremonies, songs and ritual formulae. The latter is composed entirely of words that

[1] Thus A marries B who has children M and N by the recently dead X, and older children P and Q by T who died years before. When X married B he renamed P and Q, and now on X's death A proceeds not only to rename M and N but also to rename P and Q once more.

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198 apparently were once part of the ordinary language but by reason of their
192 becoming *pukimani* by one of the methods mentioned above have been dropped completely from everyday use and retained only in the memory of the older people until they are brought out again in some new song or substituted in the ordinary language for some word newly prohibited. The meaning then has to be explained to the younger people who have been born since the word formed part of the ordinary language.

It can easily be understood that in this mass of words handed down orally for centuries there are a number retained of which the meanings have been lost. For example it is quite impossible to obtain a word for word translation of any initiation song of the Tiwi, numbers of words being introduced which are totally meaningless alike to the singer, the maker of the song and to the audience. These words correspond to some extent to the "tra-la-la" or other nonsense syllables frequently found in modern American popular songs, being introduced to provide the correct rhythm or metre, to echo the sense of the song or for some conventional reason, certain meaningless words being exclusively found associated with other words, the meaning of which is known.

551 One of the favourite methods of coining names is to select one of these meaningless words and add one of the nominal suffixes mentioned above to it. Thus *matirandjiŋili* is a word frequently used in songs, the meaning of which is obscure. *Materandjiŋimirli* is, however, a proper name.

Place names are sometimes added to by a suffix or otherwise changed to become proper names. Thus *Pripanyimili*, a district of South Bathurst, gives *Pripantimiri* a masculine name; *Poru*, the district opposite the mission station, gives rise to *Porutimiri* a male name and *Porutimiu* a female name. (It should be noted that there is no connection between such a name and the district of origin or residence of the person bearing the name.)

428 The commonest method of all is for the name to descend in the direct
553 male line. That is, after the death of the father one of his sons (usually but not invariably the eldest) disregarding the name bestowed upon him by his mother's new husband, allows a sufficient time to elapse for the tabu to lose its efficacy and then assumes his father's name. This is done either of his own volition or by the older men of his horde who were the contemporaries of his father adopting the practice of using his

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father's name towards him and thus implying their approval of his taking that name. To select one example—there is at present in the Tiklowila horde a man *Pwandjilora* whose father was also a *Pwandjilora* who died about fifteen years ago. His father in turn was also a *Pwandjilora*, who is only remembered by the very old people of the horde.

This succession of names also takes place though to a very much lesser degree in the female line, that is from mother to daughter.

It must not be thought, however, that there is any such thing as private ownership of names by a family. A man but distantly related to *Pwandjilora II* would be quite at liberty to bestow that name upon one of his children were it not already in use and had a sufficient time elapsed since his death. An example is a famous warrior of the last generation called *Walitoami*. This name has recently been bestowed by one of the Tiklowila upon his son though neither he, the child, nor the mother of the child is closely related to the first *Walitoami*. As a matter of fact the child is the mother's brother's son's daughter's son of *Walitoami I*.

One or two other aspects of this subject may be dismissed briefly as they are more important in a study of kinship or ceremonial, than in a study of names as such.

A man may not in any circumstances use the name of the wife of another man, even the names of his brother's wives, without giving the husband a *casus belli*. A woman is a man's own property and the use of her name is an infringement of his property rights. In the same way a man's own name is his own property and cannot be used with impunity, at least in the presence of the owner of the name. In calling out to a person for instance, he will always be addressed by a kinship term, never by a personal name. This also is the manner by which the news of a death is carried to distant camps and the name of the dead man avoided, "your mother's brother at *Wilrangu* of the *Tjilarui* totem and the son of so and so is dead at *Brega*" being an example of how a relative is informed. The dead man is thenceforward referred to as "he who died recently at *Brega*."

There is another prohibition against the use by a husband of his own wife's name whilst she is in childbirth. For a couple of weeks before the birth and for a couple of weeks afterwards the husband must not look upon his wife, he cannot use any of her names, nor can any others of the tribe mention her either by name or by implication to him. Even such an

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551 843 expression as *int'abominsiiya* (=your wife) is forbidden, nor for example can one of the woman's brothers enquire the whereabouts of his sister from the woman's husband. There is no such prohibition, however, against the use of her name nor against references to her by the rest of the tribe provided always the husband is not within hearing.

551 561 881 None of the names of a person passing through any stage of initiation can be used by anyone at all. Such a person is always alluded to or addressed as *Watyinyirti* or *Mikinyirtiya* or whatever degree of initiation he or she has reached. As the normal initiation ceremonies are carried out continuously from the age of seventeen to the age of about twenty-six for a man and from ten to nineteen for a girl, for those periods of their lives personal names are seldom used.

I propose to call these names "initiation-grade names," since they are applied to an individual according to the grade of initiation he has reached. A full list of them is as follows :—

Initiation-Grade Names (Male).

Average Age.		Duration of Grade.	
15-17	..	1 year	*Maru-kumarni*
15-17	..	6 months	*Kilipirni-ati*
16-18	..	6 months	*Watyinyirti*
18-20	..	2 years	*Mikin yirtiya*
19-21	..	1 year	*Mikin djira*
20-22	..	1 year	*Mikadjirima*
24-26	..	4 years	*Mikin gula*

Initiation-Grade Names (Female)[1].

10-12	..	1 year	*Maru-kumarniya*
15-17	..	6 months	*Kilipirni-atiya*
11-13	..	6 months	*Watyinyirtiya*
13-15	..	2 years	*Mikin yirtiyiya*
14-16	..	1 year	*Mikin djiriya*
15-17	..	1 year	*Mikadjiriniya*
19-21	..	4 years	*Mikin guliya*

551 561 In addition to these initiation-grade names there is also a series of names which I propose to call "age-grade names." These are more

[1] In actual practice the female names are not nearly as commonly used as the male.

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strictly descriptive rather than terms of address, yet quite frequently they are used in both ways. They refer to the state of life the person has reached and are often used as substitute names during the period in which an individual is nameless on account of his name being tabu. Names such as baby, young man, etc., are of course found in every language; it is their occasional use as terms of address that makes them interesting among the Tiwi, and also the fact that Spencer has confused them with the initiation-grade names. These names are:—

Age-Grade Names (Male).

Male baby	(Birth to about 11)	*Kiritini*
Boy approaching puberty	(12-14)	*Mala-kuniŋa*
Uninitiated boy or young man		*Tatiŋ-ati*
Young man during initiation	(Initiation Grade Term)	
Initiated man		*Mikingula*
Old man	(over 60)	*Irula or Palini*

Age-Grade Names (Female).

Female baby	(Birth to about 6)	*Kiritiŋa*
Girl approaching puberty	(7 to 11)	*Aliiŋa*
Girl beginning to menstruate	(12-14)	*Muru-kibura*
Girl at first pregnancy		*Miriŋaladja*
Shortly before birth of child		*Poporŋanti*
Mother of male child		*Ari-aui*
Mother of female child		*Pirnambili*
Mother of several children		*Nuraŋ-rika*
Old women with children		*Pirimariŋa*
Barren woman		*Timiriŋa*

If these two lists are compared with Spencer,[4] it will be found that all the names which he gives as "status terms" are included in one or other of my two lists with the exception of "Gunmurdi" which Spencer gives as "very old man," and which I was quite unable to trace at all. I have adopted the division into age-grade names and initiation-grade names and rejected "status terms" altogether as the two groups of names are quite distinct, one depending on age, the other on advancement in initiation.

[4] *Native Tribes of Northern Australia*, 1914, p. 84.

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551 To sum up then the main points in the customs of the Tiwi connected with personal names, the outstanding features are these :—

(1) Multiplicity of personal names.
(2) Death renders tabu the names of the dead man.
(3) Death renders tabu similar words in the language.
(4) Death renders tabu names bestowed upon others by the dead man.
(5) Method of coining names.
(6) Tabu on names at certain times (*e.g.*, childbirth, initiation).

551 It is fairly evident from the facts cited in this paper that among the
424 Tiwi at any rate a personal name is the absolute property of the person
795 possessing it. Further than that, it is so identified with his personality
198 that even the use of it by anyone else in resented by the owner. There is no space here to describe the theology of the Tiwi, but it must be pointed out that after the death of a man his spirit does not go with his body to the region of the dead, but wanders about the world in a form both invisible and malignant. Just as an individual when alive would resent the use of his name so too will his spirit and will be much more dangerous an enemy on account of his supernatural form. Spirits are not only malignant, they are also unreasonable, and whereas a live man would not quarrel with you for using an ordinary word resembling his name, his ghost is quite likely not to appreciate the difference. Hence the prohibition against similar words. While in touch with the unseen world it pays to be careful. But in dealing with the unseen world the Tiwi have a special language. This body of words has a sacredness of its own, it is a part of the spirit world itself. Therefore you may incur the enmity of a spirit by using his mundane name or some similar mundane word, but the use of a similar word in the sacred language cannot do any harm; the spirit will not get annoyed with you for using a spirit word, especially as you can only use it in any case on sacred occasions. Hence there is no tabu on similar words in the sacred language.

551 This principle of the sacred language for use when in touch with
844 supernatural situations also helps us to understand several other things. The birth of a child is, to a native, a most mysterious affair and the woman is regarded as being intimately in touch with the spirit world. Hence her name as part of herself is invested with a ghostly character and this is expressed by the tribe in treating her husband as if she did not exist, as if

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she were dead in fact and for the time being no longer his wife. She is in touch with the spirits and the result will be a child for her husband. Since he is too close to the mystery for comfort they abstain from mentioning it in his presence. 551 844

The result of the childbirth is a child and that child was recently a spirit. Therefore the name must come from the sacred language.

Initiation ceremonies also involve a very close contact with the spirit world. Initiation is a sacred rite and sacred names must be taken when passing through its various stages. When *Timalaykumi* is seized by men of his sister's husband's totem and yellow grease is smeared on his chest he ceases to be *Timalaykumi* and becomes *Maru-kumani*, a person in touch with unseen forces, and he therefore must have a sacred name. His previous name came from the sacred language, but this is a change of status and is expressed by giving him a new name, one that is only used on such occasions. 553 881

The fact that death renders sacred all the concepts closely associated with the dead man does no doubt play a large part in causing the tabu on names he has bestowed upon other people. There is I think another factor which is even more important in the causation of this particular tabu. When a man marries a widow he becomes to the tribe not the foster father of her children but the actual father. It cannot be pointed out too often that the Australian blackfellow does not distinguish physiqlogical and social fatherhood. The new husband is married to the widow, he therefore must be the father of her children. Her children change their position in the tribe, and the function of the changing of their names is to show this change and the new social relationships that have been imposed upon them by it. It will be remembered in this connection that the husband changes the names of *all* the woman's children whether of her last husband or not, and also that words in either the sacred or the ordinary language which are similar in sound to the former names of the children do not become tabu. That is, it is a social not a sacred change of name. 553 587 768 593

It might be argued that the widow changes her status also, yet her name is not changed. But in point of fact she does not alter her status; her new husband is usually of the same clan as her last one, and frequently he is an actual brother of the dead man. In any case her new husband cannot change her name as she is not one of the people he can bestow names upon. Nor does her name mean to the tribe any relation to her 587 768 553

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previous husband; he did not bestow it, therefore there is no necessity for her successor to change it.

In conclusion it seems almost superfluous to point out the necessity in such a society for a large number of personal names for the individual. When such a number of tabu on names exist a man with only one name would be constantly having to live for long periods nameless, but with multiple names it is almost a certainty at any particular time that some of them will be free from any of the prevailing tabu.

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